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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 004666

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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS HOPE FOR EARLY
RAISES FROM FERNANDEZ ADMINISTRATION

REF: SANTO DOMINGO 2026

[11.](#) Summary. The salary dispute between the Association of Air Traffic Controllers (ACTA) and the Dominican Civil Aviation Authority (DGAC) that resulted in a three-day lockout in late March remains unresolved. Although the union and the government do not have good relations now, there is hope that when the new administration takes power on August 16 the two sides can reinitiate constructive discussions.
End Summary.

[12.](#) The Dominican Association of Air Traffic Controllers (ACTA) represents the approximately 200 civilian air traffic controllers in the Dominican Republic. Many of the controllers work in private airports, but all are paid by the government. In late March 2004 ACTA asked for a 100 percent pay increase for all air traffic controllers and suggested the possibility of a "go-slow" action (reftel). The government locked out the controllers and turned to the approximately 50 Dominican military controllers. The military controllers managed the system, although with delays, until ACTA was allowed back to work a few days later. The government also brought in an unknown number of foreign air traffic controllers (including Mexicans and some AmCits), under contract through the May 16 election, to stand by in case of further labor problems.

Government View

[13.](#) On August 3, Director of Aviation Regulations for the Dominican Civil Aviation Authority (DGAC) Gender Castro, an air traffic controller himself, reiterated to Emboffs the Mejia administration's position that there is no money available to the controllers because the government budget is not healthy enough to provide raises for all of the public sector. Castro cited President Mejia's rebuttal that "this country is not for one, but for all." Castro said that DGAC and ACTA do not disagree that controllers deserve a salary increase, but disagree that the government should provide such an increase only to them.

[14.](#) According to Castro, ACTA rejected a suggestion from the private sector for a combination of raises and increased benefits. DGAC thinks that ACTA has become politicized and would reject any proposal short of the 100 percent pay raise. Castro complained that it was impossible to deal with ACTA because of the union's hostility toward the current government.

[15.](#) When asked about the performance of the military controllers during the lockout, Castro said that although they are capable of performing the job of the civilian controllers in an emergency, the military does not have enough controllers to handle the traffic for more than a few days. The government would need help from outside controllers in the event of a lengthy strike or lockout.

Union View

[16.](#) On August 10, ACTA President Bolivar De Leon told Emboffs that since the last salary increase for controllers in 1997, due to the devaluation of the Dominican peso the controllers now make less than half in dollars of what they used to earn.

(News reports indicate that controllers received a 100 percent salary adjustment in pesos at the end of 2002, although even with the raise the average controller still made only about USD 1000 per month.) De Leon said that the controllers want salaries commensurate with those of air traffic controllers in the United States because the technical skills and stress are the same. DGAC disagrees, contending that Dominican controllers handle fewer flights and do not possess the same level of technical English as their counterparts.

[17.](#) De Leon indicated that although relations are not good with DGAC, ACTA hopes for improvements with the incoming Fernandez administration, which takes office on August 16. De Leon appeared confident that an agreement on salaries could be reached quickly with the new administration.

Comment

18. The negotiating position of ACTA is relatively weak because Mejia showed that the air traffic controllers could be replaced. However, ACTA will probably move immediately to restart salary negotiations with Fernandez even though Fernandez has said publicly that he is going to concentrate on improving the overall health of the economy before raising public sector salaries. When poloff asked De Leon what ACTA would do if Fernandez did not agree to raise salaries straight away, the union chief declined to respond. Fernandez will have a brief honeymoon when he takes office, but many groups, including the controllers, are expecting little short of a miracle. Labor conflict in the Dominican Republic could increase dramatically by the end of the year.

KUBISKE